

# STATEMENT

BY

## MEDICAL LECTURERS IN EDINBURGH

IN

### REGARD TO MEDICAL REFORM.

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THE Medical Lecturers are deeply interested in the present aspect of the Medical Reform question, and some of them have determined to submit the following statement of their views to those who may be disposed to promote legislation on the subject. It will not be denied that the Medical School of Edinburgh has, at different times, owed much of its celebrity to extra-academical teachers. The present lecturers have made strenuous efforts, according to the measure of their ability, to support the reputation of Edinburgh as a centre of medical instruction. They trust, therefore, that representations on their behalf, though not founded on any corporate privilege, may meet with that attention which is due to the plea of simple justice.

The Universities of Scotland generally, and that of Edinburgh among others, are characterised by a feature of exclusiveness, which is peculiar to them. They exercise the legal privilege of granting the degree of M.D., an honour highly esteemed, and of national, if not of universal, significance; but the powers originally confided to the Senate of the University have been set aside, and the medical professors, always a small body, and even in Edinburgh only amounting to twelve, have for many years taken into their own hands the entire control of the machinery by which this honour is conveyed. The examiners of the University of Edinburgh, are not, as in many other universities, appointed by a system of election from a large body of graduates and other competent persons; neither are they subject to dismissal, even in case of proved incompetency; the rule is, that each professor examines upon the subject which he teaches; and that his decisions are, upon that subject, practically uncontrolled. The consequence is, that the degree of M.D. in the University of Edinburgh, is either a certificate of approval, given by teachers to their own pupils; or it is a verdict passed by a body of teachers upon the pupils of competing teachers, or of a rival institution.

It is not to be inferred from the above statement, that the framers of this

document consider the power of the professors, in their double function of teachers and examiners, to have been habitually abused ; on the contrary, they are most anxious to record their opinion, that, with rare exceptions, it has been fairly and honourably exercised. But a power so liable to abuse, and so arbitrary, is an anomaly too dangerous, and too indefensible, to remain much longer without challenge from those to whose disadvantage it operates. That a remonstrance on the subject should come from Edinburgh, cannot be surprising : for it is in Edinburgh alone that a body of teachers, unchartered and unprivileged, have been able to maintain a complete and efficient school of medical science and practice, side by side with a university arming its professors with a monopoly of the examining power.

It is to be observed, as marking the sense entertained of such a monopoly as this in other quarters, that although two universities granting degrees in medicine, one in London, and one in Ireland, have received Charters from the Crown within the last quarter of a century, in neither of them has the power of examination been intrusted to a small and virtually irresponsible body such as the Medical Faculty of the University of Edinburgh. The state of the Scottish universities, in this respect, is not that of any similar institution known to the framers of this document ; for even in the universities of France and of Germany, where the examinations for the degree are conducted by the professors of medicine, the examining board includes the assistant and extraordinary professors, a large and important body, corresponding very much in actual position with the extra-academical lecturers in Edinburgh. In no instance, it is believed, beyond the limits of Scotland, does a body of less than twelve university professors exercise an uncontrolled power of granting or withholding the honours of the degree ; while an equal number of accredited and respectable teachers, out of doors, are obliged to submit their pupils to the arbitrary judgment of their competitors and rivals.

The University of Edinburgh would, however, have probably continued to exercise these privileges, invidious as they are, without challenge for the present, had it not sought, in the recent negotiations on medical reform, to acquire a new and even less justifiable advantage over the extra-academical teachers. Not content with the legal privilege of granting an honorary title, it is understood that the University of Edinburgh claims for its medical professors, under Lord Elcho's bill, a share in the examination for the diploma of the general practitioner. It proposes, in other words, that the influence which the Medical Faculty exercises, as an examining body, over the students of the Edinburgh school, shall be still further extended. It must be remembered, that pupils are guided in selecting their teachers, to a considerable extent, by the power those teachers are able to exercise over their future fortunes. No proposition has ever been made to admit extra-academical teachers, *as such*, to the examining board for the diploma of general practitioner.<sup>1</sup> To admit, therefore, the professors of the uni-

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<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, so jealous has the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh been on this point, that up to a late period, all teachers were formally excluded from its examining board. This regulation has now been relaxed ; and teachers of medicine, whether intra or extra-academical, are eligible.



versity, *as such*, seems to be in a high degree unfair towards the rival lecturers, who have already reason to complain of the predominating influence of the professors, in virtue of their being the exclusive examiners for the degree of M.D.

The extra-academical lecturers, who publish this appeal, are extremely unwilling to put forward any special views on medical reform, founded on the considerations above mentioned. They believe, however, that the best interests of the science and art of medicine require rather the removal of the monopoly, which the professors of the university at present enjoy, of examining for the degree of M.D., than that these professors should, to the exclusion of the extra-academical lecturers, acquire a new privilege as examiners for the diploma. The framers of this document cannot but feel that such a privilege, accorded to the professors, would make it extremely difficult for lecturers outside the university, however meritorious, to compete with those who, in addition to the advantages of an academic position, employed against them the influence acquired as examiners for the license to practise.

EDINBURGH, May 26, 1857.

